



News Release

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CHANGING HISTORY: Make September a Drowning-Free Month

(Salt Lake City, UT) – If it's true history repeats itself, at least one Utah child will die by drowning in September. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) reports that, over the past three years, 3 Utahns age 19 and under drowned during the month of September. Two of the victims died in bathtubs at home and one was found drowned in a backyard canal. June and July are the deadliest months for drowning, with an average of 4.5 fatalities per month.

The Health Department's Violence and Injury Prevention experts say most drowning deaths can be prevented. Program manager, Trisha Keller, challenges Utahns to change history and make sure no children drown in September by following simple safety rules.

"Because there are so many ways children can drown, parents must be constantly aware of what their children are doing," said Keller. "At home, avoid leaving young children in the bathtub alone while you answer the door or the phone; use toilet seat locks; and make sure there are no buckets of water left where children can find them."

Outside, provide constant supervision when children are in or near water, including home and neighborhood pools. At commercial pools, don't count on lifeguards to watch your young ones every minute. One estimate states that 500 people drown every year in pools and bodies of water where lifeguards are present. The Jeff Ellis and Associates lifeguard training company reports its own tests show lifeguards take an average of 1 minute and 14 seconds to get to a dummy placed in the water to simulate a drowning.

"There is no substitute for parental supervision," says Keller.

An analysis of the state's drowning data for the years 2000–2002 shows 51% of childhood drowning deaths occur in lakes, rivers, streams and canals, and 15% occur in bath tubs.

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“Bath tub drownings are very preventable, said Keller. “In nearly every case, they happen because the parent leaves the room for just a minute, and the child goes under.”

Parents shouldn’t assume an older child can supervise a younger one around water, even in a tub. “Even though your 6-, 7- or 8-year-old may seem mature, children that age aren’t often developmentally ready to know when a sibling is in trouble in the water,” said UDOH Deputy Director Scott Williams.

In Utah, more than half (56%) of drowning victims are less than 6 years old. Adolescents ages 15–19 account for 23% of drownings, and most were trying to swim a long distance in an open body of water when they drowned.

The key to drowning prevention outdoors is personal flotation devices (PFDs). No one should ever board a boat without one on. Parents should know that “floaties,” swim rings and other water play toys are just that—toys—and will not prevent drowning. “We know children think PFDs are too confining,” said Keller. “But confined is better than dead. So put a PFD on every child, even if they are just playing at the water’s edge, because you never know when they’ll wander away or when a dangerous current is just a few feet from shore.”

For more information, contact Cyndi Bemis at the Utah Department of Health Violence and Injury Prevention Program at (801) 538-6348.

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